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AFGHANISTAN: UNITED NATIONS-SPONSORED NEGOTIATIONS
AN ANNOTATED CHRONOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

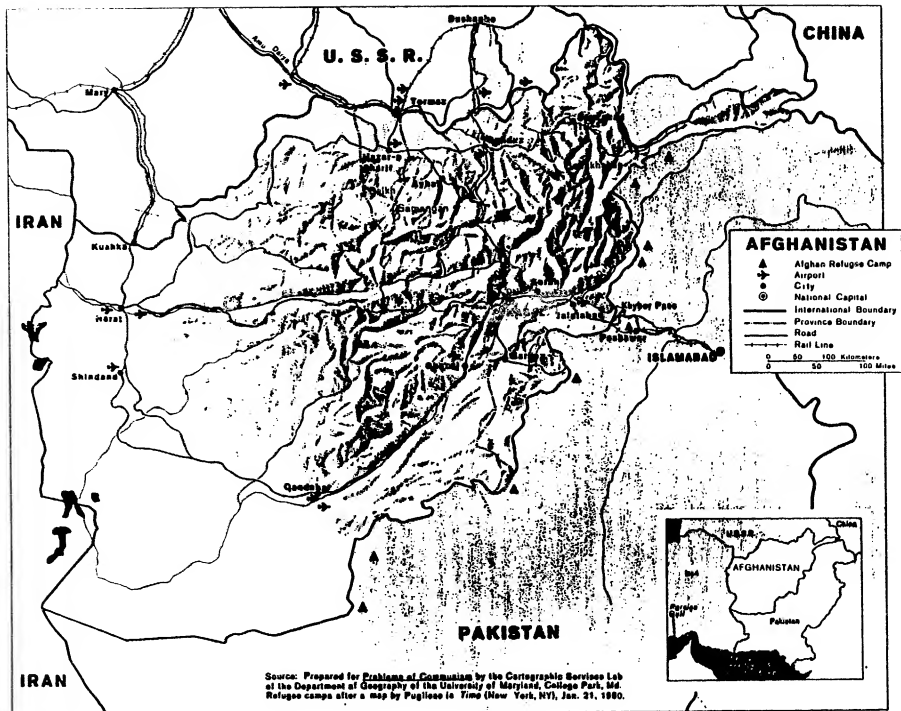
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ABSTRACT

Seven rounds of indirect "proximity" talks at Geneva under United Nations auspices between Pakistan and the Soviet-backed Afghan regime have failed to produce a settlement of the Afghanistan conflict. The parties have made progress on drafting language dealing with mutual non-interference between Pakistan and Afghanistan, guarantees thereof by outside powers, and the return of the Afghan refugees to Afghanistan. In early 1986 the Soviets offered for the first time to discuss, through the Afghan representatives, a time frame for the withdrawal of their forces. Reportedly, however, the parties remain far apart on what constitutes an acceptable time frame, and the May 1986 Geneva round ended with no substantive progress on this crucial issue. The next round is scheduled for July 30, 1986.

Source: Khalilzad, Zalmay. *Soviet-Occupied Afghanistan. Problems of Communism*, Nov.-Dec. 1980. p. 25.



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PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

Since June 1982, Pakistan and the Soviet-backed Afghan regime have participated in seven rounds of indirect "proximity" talks on Afghanistan at Geneva under the sponsorship of the United Nations. The negotiations have been noteworthy in several respects.

-- Pakistan has shown flexibility in making procedural concessions, including acceptance of a change in the format of the settlement draft from one that included a chapter heading explicitly referring to the withdrawal of foreign forces, to a formula that would only indirectly link a Soviet withdrawal to an agreement on other issues. Pakistan has refused to talk directly with representatives of the Karmal regime, despite an initial indication that it would talk to them as leaders of the ruling party. It has continued to insist on a short timetable for a Soviet withdrawal and simultaneity in the application of all aspects of an agreement as an absolute requirement.

-- While not formally a party to the talks, the Soviets have cooperated with the U.N. effort and allowed the Afghans to participate without prior recognition by Pakistan of the Kabul regime or face-to-face negotiations with the Afghan delegates. While insisting that a troop withdrawal was solely a matter between themselves and the Afghan authorities, the Soviets have acknowledged that in some form a withdrawal agreement could be part of a settlement. In May 1986 the Soviets allowed the Afghan delegates to discuss the withdrawal of Soviet forces, but reportedly Pakistan judged the suggested time frame unacceptably long.

-- It cannot be ascertained from the public record what advice the United States may have given Pakistan at any time, but at least until late 1985 press reports often indicated a negative or highly skeptical attitude on the part of the Reagan Administration towards the U.N. negotiations. In December 1986, the State Department conveyed to the U.N. Secretary General the U.S. willingness to act as a guarantor for an acceptable agreement providing for the withdrawal of Soviet forces. At the same time, the Reagan Administration publicly warned the Soviet that it was prepared to increase aid to the resistance if the Soviets were not forthcoming in the talks.

-- As of mid 1986, the prospect of the talks achieving a near-term settlement involving a Soviet withdrawal still appears remote. The essential point of deadlock -- linking various aspects of a settlement to a Soviet withdrawal within a relatively brief time period -- has persisted since June 1983. The reversal of the Soviet attitude towards discussing a troop withdrawal time frame has not yet resulted in substantive progress at Geneva. Both Pakistan and the Soviet side have incentives to continue the talks, but the parties continue also to have strong motivation not to compromise their basic negotiating positions.

ANNOTATED CHRONOLOGY AND ANALYSIS*

Basis for the Negotiations

The United Nations has assumed a direct role in seeking a political settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan. The second U.N. General Assembly resolution on Afghanistan of November 20, 1980, included a provision drafted and promoted by Pakistan calling for all parties to work towards a political settlement. The resolution specifically expressed the hope that the Secretary-General would appoint a special representative to promote a settlement in accordance with the U.N. resolution, and explore the securing of appropriate guarantees for the non-use of force or threats of force against neighboring states, on the basis of mutual guarantees and strict non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

The Soviet Union has rejected this and all similar U.N. resolutions as an intrusion into Afghanistan's internal affairs and its bilateral relations with the U.S.S.R. While Moscow has cooperated with and even encouraged the Secretary-General's efforts to promote a settlement, it does not accept the United Nations mandate as flowing from the U.N. resolutions on Afghanistan.

*Margaret Holly Isdale, a student intern in the Cornell-in-Washington program, assisted in compiling this chronology.

Inception of the Negotiations 1/

The negotiations began in mid-1982 only after months of maneuvering by Pakistan, on the one side, and the Soviet Union and Afghanistan on the other. Issues included the role of the U.N. representative, the status of the Afghan delegation, and procedural issues concerning the character of the talks themselves.

Pakistan took the lead in urging the Secretary-General to follow up on the U.N. resolution of November 1980 and appoint a special representative. It favored trilateral talks involving Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan, with Kabul's delegates representing only the ruling Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Pakistan argued that talks should be based on four points from the U.N. resolution:

- (1) A politically independent and nonaligned Afghanistan;
- (2) The withdrawal of foreign troops;
- (3) Self-determination for Afghanistan without outside interference or subversion; and
- (4) Creating conditions for the return of the refugees "in safety and honour." 2/

Pakistan pushed for the negotiations in other forums such as the Islamic Conference and the Nonaligned Movement (NAM) and secured the backing of its

1/ This section is constructed from a number of sources, including: Kaufman, Michael T. Afghanistan and Pakistan Report Progress Toward Beginning Talks. New York Times, Jan. 7, 1981. p. 4; Nossiter, Bernard D. Afghan Peace Moves: Mixed Motives. New York Times, Feb. 5, 1981. p. A3; Ali, Salamat. Afghanistan: Diplomats in Deadlock. Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER), Feb. 13, 1981. p. 20-21; Ram, Mohan. Moscow in the Firing Line. FEER, Feb. 20, 1981. p. 8-9. Auerbach, Stuart. Waldheim Appoints Aide to Initiate Negotiations on Afghan Intervention. Washington Post, Feb. 12, 1981. p. A29; Morello, Ted. Sweet and Sour Diplomacy. FEER, Aug. 28, 1981. p. 31; Morello, Ted. Trench Diplomacy. FEER, Oct. 9, 1981. p. 31.

2/ Far Eastern Economic Review, Feb. 13, 1981. p. 20.

Islamic allies and China. Agha Shahi specifically flew to Beijing to explain Pakistan's approach and, presumably, secure Chinese assent to talks involving Kabul's representatives. 3/ As of early 1981, the United States was not a factor of visible prominence.

During late 1980 and early 1981, Moscow sent mixed signals about the proposed talks. While giving indications of support for negotiations, the Soviets preferred a minimal role for the United Nations and wanted recognition of Kabul as a basic principle. The Kabul regime apparently opposed any internationalization of the talks and wanted to deal with Iran and Pakistan on a strictly bilateral, government-to-government basis.

In late 1980, however, the Soviets apparently decided that a forthcoming posture on negotiations would lessen the international political damage from their continued occupation of Afghanistan. In December 1980, on the eve of President Brezhnev's visit to New Delhi, the Soviet Ambassador told Pakistan that Kabul was prepared to talk without mentioning recognition as a precondition. The Soviets reportedly also informed U.N. Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim of their support for talks. 4/

Appointment of U.N. Negotiator

On February 11, 1981, U.N. Secretary-General Waldheim appointed Under Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar as his "personal representative" following separate discussions with the foreign ministers of Afghanistan and Pakistan at the New Delhi Nonaligned foreign ministers meeting. (In deference

3/ Ibid.

4/ Ibid., p. 20-21.

to Moscow's rejection of the U.N. resolution on Afghanistan, he was not titled a "special representative" as had been called for in that resolution.) The immediate prospects for talks looked dim. Pakistan's foreign minister Agha Shahi urged that Perez de Cuellar visit the "concerned capitals" to iron out procedural obstacles. 5/

Initial Response of the Parties

The prospects for negotiations brightened after two visits to Islamabad and Kabul by Perez de Cuellar in April and August 1981. On August 24, 1981, following a European Economic Community (EEC) peace initiative sponsored by Lord Carrington and preceding the annual fall U.N. debate on Afghanistan, the Kabul government indicated to Pakistan that it no longer insisted on strictly bilateral talks and implied that it would accept a larger U.N. role. Likewise, the Afghan foreign minister, Mohammad Dost, told Indian Prime Minister Gandhi during a visit to New Delhi that Kabul was "flexible" concerning procedural matters. 6/

In August, following his return from a shuttle mission to the region, Perez de Cuellar reported to the U.N. Secretary-General that Pakistan and Afghanistan had reached agreement on a four-point agenda:

- (1) The withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan;
- (2) Pledges of non-interference in each other's internal affairs by both Pakistan and Afghanistan;

5/ Washington Post, Feb. 16, 1981.

6/ Kaufman, Michael T. Afghan Official, in India, Espouses New Flexibility. New York Times, Sept. 8, 1981. p. A13.

(3) International guarantees concerning non-interference (reportedly involving the Soviet Union, China, and the United States); and

(4) The return of the refugees. 7/

The achievement of this understanding was followed by indirect talks at the U.N. headquarters, which broke up on September 28, 1981, without any progress. At the time, Dost, the Afghan foreign minister, criticized what he charged was a growing U.S. role in supplying arms to the Afghan resistance. He claimed that Afghanistan was ready for either bilateral or trilateral talks, but stressed again Kabul's insistence that the talks be direct government-to-government negotiations. Perhaps more important, he staked out the Soviet-Afghan position that an accord with Pakistan would only constitute "'an opportunity to determine by agreement' between Afghanistan and the U.S.S.R. the timetable for the withdrawal of Soviet troops." [Emphasis added.] 8/

Some reporting suggests that Pakistan also hardened its position, allegedly under American influence, and surprised Waldheim with its refusal to talk directly to Kabul's delegation even as representatives of the ruling party. At this point, it was reported, Waldheim deemed the meetings pointless and called them off. 9/

Appointment of Diego Cordovez as U.N. Negotiator

The elevation of Perez de Cuellar to the post of U.N. Secretary-General resulted in the February 1982 appointment of Under Secretary Diego Cordovez, of Ecuador, as his personal representative for Afghanistan. Cordovez visited

7/ Morello, Far Eastern Economic Review, Aug. 28, 1981. p. 31

8/ Ibid. October 9, 1981. p. 31.

9/ Ibid.

Kabul, Islamabad, and Teheran in April 1982. The visit to Teheran marked the first time Iran had agreed to receive a United Nations negotiator. 10/

Geneva I -- June 1982 Round

The first round of the Geneva talks between Pakistan and Afghanistan finally began in mid-June 1982. (Iran refused to participate but asked to be kept informed.) The talks were "indirect," in that Cordovez shuttled between the delegates from Pakistan and Afghanistan sitting in the same building at different times. Without giving details, it was reported that "Mr. Cordovez said that the two countries had made important concessions and that he planned to visit Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran this fall with the broad outline of an agreement." 11/

The Andropov Succession: Conflicting Signals

Following Brezhnev's death, the Soviets sent conflicting signals about their approach to the Afghanistan situation. At Brezhnev's funeral in December 1982, Yuri Andropov reportedly told Pakistan's President Zia that the Soviet Union wanted to get out of Afghanistan and would leave "quickly" if Pakistan quickly ceased its support of the resistance. Subsequent official Soviet media statements, however, appeared deliberately calculated to refute Zia's optimistic

10/ Far Eastern Economic Review, April 16, 1982. p. 7.

11/ Gwertzman, Bernard. Joint Talks Held on Afghan Dispute. New York Times, July 24, 1982. p. 3.

assessment. U.N. officials, especially Diego Cordovez, reportedly saw a "window for diplomacy." 12/

Cordovez undertook a shuttle to Teheran, Kabul, and Islamabad between January 21 and February 7, during which he presented a working draft of an agreement. 13/ In March 1983, Cordovez and Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar met with Soviet leaders Yuri Andropov and Andrei Gromyko in Moscow and secured assurances of support for the talks.

Geneva II — April 1983 Round

The second Geneva round began on April 8, 1983, and lasted until April 22, when the talks were adjourned to allow the negotiators to consult with their governments. While few details were reported, the overall impression from statements of Cordovez and others was that considerable progress had been made in fleshing out the annotated working draft of a comprehensive settlement.

Crucial Interval

Speculation about the prospects for the talks heightened considerably in May 1983. Following discussions with U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Jeanne J. Kirkpatrick, in which she reportedly conveyed U.S. support for his mission, Cordovez told the press that "95 percent of the text of the draft comprehensive settlement was ready" and that "among other elements the text envisages the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan." [Emphasis added.]

12/ Nations, Richard. Moscow's Funeral Diplomacy. FEER, Dec. 24, 1982. p. 20; Doder, Dusko. Soviets Shift Stand on Pulling Troops From Afghanistan. Washington Post, Dec. 17, 1982. p. A32; Moscow Affirms Its Afghan Policy. New York Times, Dec. 17, 1982. p. A3.

13/ The Muslim (Islamabad), Feb. 11, 1983. p. 1.

Among other things yet to be settled, according to Cordovez, were "arrangements to ascertain the voluntary character of the return of the refugees and to identify guarantors of the agreement." He said: "I have some informal indications that the Soviet Union, the United States and China will be ready to guarantee the agreement when they have examined the text." 14/

Especially because of Cordovez's optimistic statements, an atmosphere of expectation arose. Reportedly, the Soviets had indicated to both Cordovez and Pakistan's foreign minister, Yaqub Khan, that they were prepared to undertake a phased withdrawal if Pakistan would commit itself to cutting off arms to the Afghan resistance forces. A controversial article by Selig Harrison suggested that peace was within reach and that the attitude of the United States was crucial. 15/

Beginning with a visit to Beijing, Yaqub Khan consulted with the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council (Britain, France, China, the United States, and the U.S.S.R.) and the Chairman of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (Saudi Arabia) prior to returning to the Geneva talks. U.S. officials conveyed their views on the negotiations to Yaqub Khan during his visit to Washington on May 25. The expectation of possible movement in the talks reportedly generated disagreement both in Washington and in Islamabad over what stance to take, with "hardliners" in both capitals being skeptical and others being more inclined to test Soviet intentions. 16/

On the eve of the June 1983 round, Pakistani officials downplayed the prospect of an early settlement based on a Soviet withdrawal. Yaqub Khan

14/ Ibid, May 12, 1983. p. 1.

15/ Harrison, Selig S. A Breakthrough in Afghanistan? Foreign Policy, Summer 1983. p. 3-27. See also, Harrison, Selig S. Nearing a Pullout From Afghanistan. New York Times, June 7, 1983. p. 27.

16/ Washington Times. June 15, 1983. p. 7.

termed his discussions in Moscow with Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko in early June as "most fruitful," but dismissed the possibility of any spectacular breakthrough, and termed the path to a settlement as complicated and difficult. 17/

Geneva II (Continued) -- June 1983 Round

The talks that took place during June 16-25, 1983, failed to achieve significant results. The negotiations stalled amidst reports that both sides had hardened their positions. Pakistan, which had long stressed the importance of a comprehensive agreement, reportedly balked at accepting any part of the agreement as final until all parts were in place and sought to reopen discussion on clauses concerning "non-interference." 18/ Pakistan also raised the issue of arriving at a mechanism for consulting the refugees pursuant to the settlement chapter dealing with their return to Afghanistan. 19/ The Soviets, for their part, would not agree to discuss (through the Afghan representatives) a specific timetable for withdrawing their troops. The Afghan delegation reportedly concentrated on pinning down "watertight"

17/ Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS). Daily Report. South Asia, June 6, 1983. p. F2; Ibid., June 15, 1983. p. F1.

18/ Harrison, Selig. Are We Fighting to the Last Afghan? Washington Post, Dec. 29, 1983. p. A17; Darnton, John. Afghan Talks End Without Progress. New York Times, June 25, 1983. p. A17; FBIS. Daily Report. South Asia, June 20, 1983. p. F1.

19/ New York Times, June 25, 1983. p. A17; FBIS. Daily Report. South Asia, June 20, 1983. p. F1.

commitments by Pakistan regarding "non-interference," i.e., foreclosing outside aid to the resistance forces. 20/

The few apparent accomplishments of the talks included agreement by the parties that the U.N. negotiator could initiate "preliminary consultations" with Moscow and Washington regarding their willingness to act as guarantors of a settlement, and an understanding that in some fashion the United Nations would seek to find modalities for consulting with the refugees at an early date. 21/

Despite expressions of interest in the talks by all parties, Perez de Cuellar decided to cancel a proposed September 1983 visit to the region by Cordovez on grounds that the nature of the deadlock did not offer much hope of early resolution. 22/

During the fall session of the United Nations, in which the Afghanistan resolution was passed for the fifth time and by its largest margin yet (116 to 20 with 17 abstentions), U.N. officials continued informal discussions on the issue. In November 1983, the U.N. announced that Cordovez would resume his shuttle mission at a time agreeable to the parties.

April 1984 Shuttle -- A New Negotiating Format

Diego Cordovez visited Teheran, Kabul, and Islamabad in early April 1984 in an effort to get the talks started again. In the interim, Andropov had

20/ Harrison, Are We Fighting, p. A17; Danton, Afghan Talks End, p. A17. A cryptic account of the developments between April and June 1983, couched in highly cautious diplomatic language, is contained in United Nations Secretary-General, 1982 - (Perez de Cuellar). Report of the Secretary-General. [New York] United Nations, October 7, 1985. para. 4. (United Nations [Document] A/40/709: S/17527.)

21/ New York Times, June 25, 1983. p. A17.

22/ U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Public Affairs. Afghanistan: Four Years of Occupation. Special Report No. 112. December 1983.

been succeeded by Chernenko, and Soviet policy appeared to have hardened. 23/ As reported later, Cordovez obtained agreement on a new "proximity" format for the talks that involved alternately conferring with the parties sitting simultaneously in adjacent rooms, rather than meeting with the foreign ministers at different times of day. More important, Cordovez also seems to have reshaped the framework for the negotiations to one that involved four "instruments": 1) "non-interference"; 2) international guarantees; 3) return of the Afghan refugees; and 4) "interrelationships." Notably, these do not include a heading specifically referring to the withdrawal of foreign forces, as had been part of the earlier four-chapter "comprehensive settlement" draft. 24/

The August 1985 round was preceded by indications of a further effort by Cordovez to change fundamentally the negotiating format. As reported by Radio Karachi, Cordovez suggested that an accord on mutual non-interference would create a climate of confidence regarding a comprehensive settlement. That formulation would by implication have further separated a Soviet troop withdrawal from Pakistan's commitment to halt aid to the resistance. Cordovez also suggested that deteriorating relations between the United States and the U.S.S.R. created obstacles to a comprehensive accord. 25/

23/ At Brezhnev's funeral, Andropov courted Zia and reportedly shunned Karmal, whereas at Andropov's funeral, "Chernenko gave Zia the cold shoulder, and granted a long audience to Karmal." Fullerton, Romey. Cordovez Starts Over. FEER, April 12, 1984. p. 12-13.

24/ United Nations Envoy Changes Format of Afghan Talks. FEER, June 21, 1984. p. 10; United Nations Representative on Upcoming Mediation Effort. FBIS. Daily Report. South Asia, Aug. 21, 1984. p. C1; United Nations, Report.

25/ FBIS. Aug. 21, 1984, p. C1.

Geneva III -- August 1984 Round

The third Geneva round, which began on August 24 and ended on August 30, 1984, did not achieve any apparent progress on fundamental issues. The round was noteworthy for the absence, for the first time, of any Soviet advisor to the Afghan side -- a development which some saw as foreclosing any possibility of significant movement in the Afghan position. 26/

The talks took place following a major Soviet offensive in the strategic Panjsher Valley and amidst Pakistan's complaints of extensive violations of its border and attacks across the frontier by aircraft from Afghanistan. 27/ Apparently, the only reportable progress was that the Afghan and Pakistani negotiators agreed that provisions concerning non-interference and non-intervention in each other's internal affairs would be included in a bilateral agreement (as one of the four "instruments"). 28/

Following the talks, Pakistan's foreign minister reiterated two points: the necessity of a timeframe for the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the creation of a mechanism under U.N. auspices for consulting with the refugees before concluding a settlement. Publicly, both Afghanistan and Pakistan expressed satisfaction with the third round and agreed to resume the indirect discussions in February 1985. 29/

26/ Foreign Report (The Economist), Sept. 13, 1984. p. F1.

27/ FBIS. Daily Report. South Asia, Aug. 29, 1984. p. F1.

28/ Report, United Nations, para 6, p.2.

29/ FBIS. Daily Report. South Asia, Aug. 28, 1984. p. F2; Sept. 19, 1984. p. F6.

Geneva IV -- June 1985

The fourth round of the Geneva talks took place in late June, 1985, having been preceded by a shuttle mission to the region by Cordovez earlier in the month. Two days before the talks opened, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Richard W. Murphy, met in Washington with Yuli Alekseyev, the Chief of the Middle Eastern Department of the Soviet foreign ministry and Oleg Sokolov, second ranking official at the Soviet Embassy in Washington. Reportedly, the talks on Afghanistan were "frank and businesslike," but both sides only reiterated past positions. 30/

The Geneva talks ended on June 25 with Cordovez being quoted as speaking "carefully and positively about the end of the 'deadlock' which had prevailed since 1983," implying "that an important advance had been made in drafting the document which could become the basis for a comprehensive settlement, if more powerful factors permit." 31/ Subsequently, however, Cordovez indicated that the appearance of movement had been based on a misunderstanding by the parties about what had been agreed to during the round. 32/

According to press reports, instruments on "non-interference," international guarantees and the return of the refugees essentially had been settled, with only the instrument of "interrelationships," which would link the Soviet withdrawal to Pakistan's commitment to restrain Afghan resistance activity emanating from its soil, yet to be completed. Essentially, the Soviet/Afghan

30/ Lee, Gary. U.S. Presses for End to Afghan War. Washington Post, June 22, 1985. p. A16.

31/ Lifshultz, Lawrence. Afghanistan: The Choice Ahead. The Muslim (Islamabad), Aug. 5, 1985. (1st of 2 part series.) p. 1.

32/ The Muslim (Islamabad), Aug. 22, 1985. p. 1

side is reported to have insisted on consecutive actions beginning with the end of "interference" and international guarantees. A withdrawal of Soviet forces was to follow at an unspecified time. Pakistan, on the other hand, maintained its insistence that all aspects of a settlement must begin simultaneously and under a specific time frame for a Soviet withdrawal. 33/

Following the talks, Pakistan's foreign minister, Yaqub Khan, was subjected to press criticism for indicating that Islamabad was prepared to talk directly to Kabul at the "appropriate time," and for expressing willingness to discuss other aspects of a settlement in the absence of readiness of the other party to discuss a withdrawal of Soviet forces. The Urdu language journal Jasarat commented that "what the foreign minister has deemed as progress in the recent talks has in fact rescinded Pakistan's basic four-point stance." 34/

Geneva V -- August 1985 Round

The fifth Geneva round, which took place between August 26 and 30, 1985, began with lower expectations than had been indicated at the end of the June round. On August 21, before departing New York for Geneva, Cordovez reportedly declared that the impending talks would "at best, constitute a 'holding operation.'" 35/

Geneva V opened with the most forceful attempt to date by the Afghans to get face-to-face negotiations. Pakistan refused. After two days of deadlock, the previous formula was reverted to in which Cordovez shuttled between the

33/ Ibid.; and FBIS. Daily Report. South Asia, June 26, 1985. p. F1.

34/ FBIS. Daily Report. South Asia, July 3, 1985. p. F1-2.

35/ The Muslim (Islamabad), Aug. 22, 1985. p. 1.

ministers sitting in separate offices in the U.N. Geneva headquarters. 36/

The talks ended with the now familiar expressions of satisfaction, but the basic procedural impasse remained. Cordovez said that the instrument on "non-interference" was "virtually completed," and that he had received satisfactory responses from the United States and the Soviet Union concerning international guarantees. (One reply, which he would not identify, was "extremely detailed.") 37/ Cordovez also said that an agreement between Afghanistan and Pakistan to repatriate the Afghan refugees might be completed in December. As for the issue of a Soviet troop withdrawal, the subject remained "under discussion." 38/

U.N. General Assembly Resolution

Pakistan gained renewed support for its position on November 13, 1985, when the U.N. General Assembly reaffirmed by the widest margin to date (122-19 with 12 abstentions) a Pakistani drafted resolution calling for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan. The Geneva talks figured prominently in the debate, with Soviet, Soviet-bloc and Afghan delegates calling for direct talks to resolve the issue. In a November 11, 1985, address at the start of the U.N. debate, Pakistani foreign minister Shahabzada Yaqub Khan argued that "Three of the four instruments have been completed through indirect talks, . . . and it defies reason to insist that the fourth instrument should be

36/ Parry, John. Afghan Talks Said to Advance. Washington Post, Aug. 31, 1985. p. A28.

37/ Ibid. It was later reported that the United States has declined to comment substantively on the draft non-interference instrument and provisions for guaranteeing a settlement until the Soviets provide a timetable for withdrawing their forces. Berlin, Michael. U.N. Urges 122-19, Pullout from Kabul. Washington Post. November 14, 1985. p. A37.

38/ Washington Post, Aug. 31, 1985. p. A28.

negotiated through a changed format." He charged that the demand "betrays Kabul's political motives and is aimed at gaining acceptance and legitimacy through the Geneva process without delivering on, or even discussing the critical aspect of withdrawals." 39/

U.S. Policy Shift?

Following the November 1985 Reagan-Gorbachev summit, in which the Soviet leader reportedly took a non-confrontational position on the Afghan issue, the Reagan Administration adopted a more forthcoming public position on the Geneva Talks. In a letter delivered to the Cordovez on December 10, the U.S. Government expressed its willingness to be a guarantor and accept the draft instrument covering guarantees "provided that the central issue of Soviet troop withdrawal and its inter-relationship to the other instruments were resolved." 40/ In a speech to a world affairs group on December 13, Deputy Secretary of State John C. Whitehead indicated that the letter, whose contents remained secret, would commit the United States to backing a "comprehensive and balanced settlement." 41/

Geneva VI -- December 1985 Round

The Geneva VI talks took place between December 16-19, 1985. The U.N. negotiator suspended them a day early in the face of a continuing impasse over the negotiating format. The Afghan side again insisted on face-to-face talks as a price for continuing the negotiations. This time the Afghans reportedly

39/ The Muslim (Islamabad), Nov. 12, 1985. p. 1

40/ FEER, Jan. 2, 1986. p. 8.

41/ Shipley, David K. U.S. Offers to Be Guarantor of an Accord in Afghanistan. Washington Post, Dec. 14, 1985. p. 1,32.

gave Cordovez a withdrawal timetable which could be discussed if Pakistan agreed to negotiate directly. Pakistan refused on grounds that this would represent recognition of the Soviet-installed regime. 42/

Despite the early suspension of the talks some forward movement was reported. This included the willingness of the Afghan side to discuss a withdrawal timetable and some substantive discussion about what should be in the fourth "instrument." Cordovez also counted as progress the fact that the United States had indicated its willingness to guarantee a settlement. 43/

Interim Developments

Several developments in early 1986 kept alive the possibility of an eventual negotiated settlement. The most tantalizing and most elusive was a report, denied by U.S. officials, that the United States and the Soviet Union had reached an "unspoken" but still undeveloped agreement providing for a settlement based on the withdrawal of Soviet troops but the retention of Afghanistan within the Soviet orbit. 44/

42/ Pakistan Disclaims Seeing Troop Pullout Schedule. Washington Post, Jan. 3, 1986. p. A24.

43/ Karachi Radio, Dec. 20, 1985 (FBIS Daily Report. South Asia, Dec. 23, 1985. p. F1); The Muslim (Islamabad), Dec. 20, 21, and 22, 1985. p. 1.

44/ According to the scenario reportedly sketched by diplomatic sources connected with the U.N. negotiations, the restoration of the status quo ante would be achieved through the replacement of the "present hard-line Afghan regime by more flexible, more pragmatic communists" and a continuing KGB involvement in Afghan internal security affairs. Faced with a cutoff of outside aid, it was reasoned, the Afghan army could suppress the more militant mujahidin while the Soviets would seek to co-opt others into some kind of coalition government. Reportedly, U.S. officials denied that any such "behind-the-scenes" proposal had been made. Wiznitzer, Louis. US, USSR Negotiate Afghan Pullout. Christian Science Monitor, Feb. 14, 1986. p. 9, 31.

Gorbachev's 27th Party Congress Speech. In a speech to the 27th party congress in February 1986 Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev emphasized both Moscow's support for the efforts of the Kabul regime to "defend its sovereignty" and a desire "in the nearest future, to withdraw the soviet (sic) troops stationed in Afghanistan at the request of its Government." The Soviet Union, he said, "had agreed with the Afghan side on the schedule for their phased withdrawal as soon as a political settlement is reached that insures an actual cessation and dependably guarantees the non-resumption of foreign interference" in Afghanistan. 45/

Cordovez's March 1986 Shuttle. After a March 1986 shuttle to Moscow, Kabul (two visits) and Islamabad, Diego Cordovez announced that the Afghan authorities had given him a document containing a timetable for the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Although he had not yet received an answer from Kabul and Islamabad about his proposal for a new negotiating format to remove the impasse in the talks, "he now had all the elements of a comprehensive settlement of the Afghan problem." 46/

Later reports indicated that the parties remained far apart on the issue of a time frame for a Soviet withdrawal. The format issue appeared to be resolved temporarily, however, with Kabul reportedly agreeing that the talks could be kept indirect until the time for actually signing an agreement and negotiating its implementation. 47/

45/ New York Times, Feb. 26, 1986. p. A11.

46/ Tokyo KYODO in English, FBIS. Daily Report. South Asia. March 18, 1986. p. C1.

47/ Rupert, James. Afghan Peace Talks to Resume. Washington Post, May 5, 1986. p. A21, 24.

Replacement of Babrak Karmal. On May 4, 1986, on the eve of the Geneva VII round, Babrak Karmal was replaced as General Secretary of the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) by the former head of the Afghan secret police, Lt. Gen. Mohammad Najibullah. While Karmal's replacement appeared nominally to address one Pakistani objection to direct talks, Najibullah hardly represented a more "legitimate" leader. His reputation as an efficient functionary with little political base beyond his Soviet backing created doubts about Moscow's intentions. Some analysts saw the change as a concession aimed at making the regime more acceptable to Pakistan. Others saw the move as clearing the way for a more effective prosecution of the war against the resistance and the consolidation of the regime, either outside the U.N. negotiations framework or in concert with a new diplomatic effort toward obtaining a settlement on Soviet terms. 48/

Geneva VII -- May 1986 Round

The Geneva VII Round began on May 19 and ended May 26, 1986, without progress on the critical issues. The talks took place against a background of intensified Soviet military pressure on Afghan resistance strongholds near the Afghanistan-Pakistan frontier, attacks on resistance bases on the Pakistani side of the border by aircraft from Afghanistan, and an air engagement in which two Pakistani F-16's reportedly shot down two intruding Soviet-made SU-22 ground attack aircraft. Reportedly, the

48/ See for instance: Thatcher, Gary. Replacement of Afghanistan's Leader Linked to Peace Talks. The Christian Science Monitor, May 6, 1986. p. 15; Lee, Gary. Soviets Seen in Changed Afghan Role. Washington Post, May 7, 1986. p. A32, 38; and Nations, Richard. Gorbachev's Game Plan: Moscow Wants to Prop Up Kabul Despite Troop Pullout. FEER, Jul. 3, 1986. p. 14-15.

talks took place in a less confrontational atmosphere -- Kabul having dropped its demand for direct talks at this stage.

By all accounts the parties remained far apart on key issues of the timetable for a Soviet troop withdrawal and the relationship of a withdrawal to the other parts of the agreement. According to a BBC report from Geneva as summarized in the Pakistani press and other press reports, the U.N. negotiator claimed progress on a number of significant issues, including agreement on several proposed articles of the fourth instrument. 49/ Reportedly, points resolved included agreement that "the final document will be legally binding, signed by the two foreign ministers, and enforced by an international monitoring team composed of representatives of mutually acceptable countries." 50/

According to information attributed to Cordovez, the Afghans insisted on an 18-month time frame, while Pakistan held out for six months or less. 51/ Another report indicated that formally the Afghans still insisted on a three-to-four year withdrawal period, but that in "preliminary probes" Pakistan had come up to 8 months and the Soviet-Afghan side had come down to 18 months. According to the same report Kabul also has accepted that the end of "interference" and a phased Soviet withdrawal would begin simultaneously. 52/

The talks were recessed until July 30, 1986.

49/ The Muslim (Islamabad), May 24, 1986. p. 1, 8.

50/ Nations, Richard. Gorbachev's Game Plan, p. 14.

51/ The Muslim (Islamabad), May 24, 1986. p. 1.

52/ Nations, Richard. Gorbachev's Game Plan. FEER, Jul. 3, 1986. p. 14.

PROSPECTS

As of mid July 1985, the likelihood of the U.N. Geneva talks leading to a settlement involving a Soviet withdrawal appears remote in the absence of fundamental change in the situation on the ground. The essential point of deadlock -- linking various other aspects of a settlement to a simultaneous, time-limited withdrawal of Soviet forces -- has persisted since the Geneva II (continuation) round of June 1983. Practically speaking, the failure of the Soviets to establish the domestic credibility of the PDPA regime, now headed by Najibullah, continuing divisions among the Afghan resistance groups and the bitter antagonism between both Afghan sides in the fighting would not appear to provide much basis for an internal settlement based on political compromise. While not a direct subject of the talks, assumptions about the future internal order in Afghanistan are crucial to the negotiating posture of the parties.

While the Soviets have given increasingly concrete evidence of their interest in a negotiated accord, there is as yet no indication that they would sacrifice the continuation of a Communist or Communist-dominated regime as a price for such a settlement. The Soviets still appear to be convinced that in time the resistance will be worn down, and Pakistan will feel compelled to agree to a settlement that will allow Moscow to withdraw its forces in such a way as to leave behind a viable Communist regime. This impression was reinforced by Karmal's

replacement by Najibullah, who by all accounts is more efficient and ruthless than his predecessor. 53/

Both Pakistan and the Soviet side have reason to continue talking. For Pakistan, the talks insure the continued involvement of the international community in this issue, reduce somewhat the possibility of Soviet aggression against Pakistan, and reassure the Pakistani public that every effort is being made to provide for the return of up to 3 million Afghan refugees. 54/ For the Soviets, the talks offer an opportunity to demonstrate their willingness to seek a peaceful settlement of an embarrassing conflict and, under the right circumstances, the chance to withdraw their forces without sacrificing their apparent fundamental goal of securing the Afghan revolution. Whether they have correctly assessed the situation and the prospects for achieving their objectives, either with or without the active involvement of Soviet troops, is widely debated.

The likelihood is that the U.N.-sponsored talks will continue, but prospects for achieving concrete results in the foreseeable future are dim. Both sides have shown flexibility and ingenuity in finding ways to keep the talks going, with the Afghans making the most recent concessions. Nonetheless, the problem for both parties is that there is decreasing scope for concessions that will not compromise their bedrock negotiating objectives, which appear to have changed little in more than three years.

53/ For a brief but comprehensive assessment of the Afghan situation see Raymond Coffey, *Afghanistan: No End in sight*. Chicago Tribune. May 18, 1986. Sec. 6, p. 8-9. See also Nayan Chanda, *Mean "Dr Ox" Takes Over*. FEER, May 15, 1986. p. 47, 49.

54/ For a more detailed analysis of Pakistan's policy towards the talks see: U.S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. *The United States, Pakistan and the Soviet Threat to Southern Asia: Options for Congress*. Report No. 85-152 F, by Richard P. Cronin. Washington, 1985.

As a number of analysts have noted, the minimum criteria for Moscow still appears to be the political goal of maintaining the PDPA regime in power. 55/ Pakistan, on the other hand, still insists on a Soviet withdrawal over a relatively short period of time under circumstances that will permit the return of the refugees. At present, these do not appear to be reconcilable objectives.

55/ Shipler, David K. The Russians Are Talking Peace But Also Digging In; The "Sovietization" of Afghanistan. New York Times. May 4, 1986. p. E4; Nations, Richard. Gorbachev's Game Plan. FEER, Jul. 3, 1986.